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No. 5 in a series
of occasional papers on
Christian Faith
and Industrial Society

MEN WHO BUILD

Some Human Problems in the Construction Industry

by Robert C. Batchelder

DETROIT
INDUSTRIAL
MISSION

MEN WHO BUILD

Some Human Problems
in the Construction Industry

- This is the story of a group of men who gathered to explore some of the moral dilemmas of their common work in the building industry.

- The story also reveals some of Detroit Industrial Mission's methods—and problems—as it seeks new forms for the church's ministry to men in industrial society.

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DETROIT INDUSTRIAL MISSION is an ecumenical agency of the church whose work is directed at reaching a clearer understanding of the issues facing men in modern industry, and clarifying what the church's ministry and message should be to men working and living in industrial society.

This series of occasional papers is being published in an effort to stimulate wider thought and discussion on this subject, both in the church and in industry. The authors are alone responsible for their statements of fact and opinion; Detroit Industrial Mission is responsible only for determining that the material published may contribute to the deepening of the conversation between church and industry.

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Additional copies of this paper may be obtained at 20¢ each from:

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The material in this paper constitutes one chap-
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book, which is the fruit of the Department's Pilot
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ıen convened in cities across the country to explore
relation of their Christian faith to the issues they
: in their various vocations. It also draws some
clusions concerning the feasibility and value of
ational discussion groups as a means by which the
rch can strengthen the laity's ministry in the
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ing the Department's other publications, may be
ıined from the Department of the Church and
nomic Life, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27,
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MEN WHO BUILD

THIS PAPER DESCRIBES a group of men from the construction industry—contractors, suppliers, architects—who gathered periodically over a period of months to explore together the relation of the Christian faith to some of the persistent human and ethical issues they face in their work. The group was convened under the auspices of Detroit Industrial Mission; it may be appropriate to note briefly at the outset something of the Mission's nature and purpose.

Detroit Industrial Mission is an ecumenical agency of the churches whose work is directed to clarifying the meaning of Christian faith for men's life and work in industrial society. The staff of the Mission is engaged full time in the effort to stimulate and establish ongoing conversations with groups of men centering on the crucial issues facing them in their work, and exploring the relation of Christian faith to these issues. Currently Detroit Industrial Mission is participating in some dozen discussion groups of men in Detroit industry in such places as executive offices and dining rooms, labor union halls, and on the shop floor of automotive and steel plants during lunch hour.

Frequently persons who endorse Detroit Industrial Mission's basic purpose are puzzled

about how this purpose works itself out in day-to-day practice. Staff members are often asked questions like "How do you go about getting men together for serious conversation?" "What specifically do you talk about?" "How is 'religion' brought into the picture?" The best way to answer such questions is to describe in some detail one specific group of men and the issues they struggled with. The group described below cannot be said to be "typical" of any other group convened by D.I.M.; men from another industry would have talked about quite different issues. Nevertheless what follows does indicate D.I.M.'s general approach, the sorts of issues many men are concerned about in their work, and some of the difficulties of relating the Christian faith as traditionally understood to the central issues of life and work in our industrialized society.

I. THE NATURE OF THE GROUP

The contractors group consisted of twenty-one men in the construction industry in the Detroit area. Four men represented large general contracting firms. Eight were subcontractors in the areas of plumbing, heating and air-conditioning, electrical, carpentering and fine woodwork, sheet metal work, and precast panels. Five were suppliers of building materials including glass, brick, lumber, and construction equipment. Three were architects, and one was a builder-owner of apartment buildings. In size the firms represented a cross-section of the Detroit building industry, ranging from two of the largest general contractors in Michigan to a one-man sheet metal business.

In age the members of the group ranged from the thirties to the fifties. Almost without exception, the men in the group were the key men in their respective firms. They had a broad over-all view of all aspects of their businesses, both technical and financial, and were

responsible for setting policy, making decisions and directing operations. They were thus in a position to determine the character and direction of their business by their personal decisions.

Religiously the group was mixed; although the majority were Protestant, there were also Roman Catholics, Jews, and one who was an avowed atheist. The denominational diversity was the result of the method of recruitment for the group, which was based neither upon common denominational label nor upon interest and activity in church work. Rather, a small core of original members invited into the group those of their work associates—regardless of religious background—who they thought were sensitive to the human and ethical dimensions of the business and might be open to participating in a serious discussion of dilemmas and issues central to their common work in building.

The contractors group differed in one respect from most other groups convened by Detroit Industrial Mission. A typical D.I.M. group consists of men who work together daily, or who at least work in the same plant or office; discussion takes place while they are gathered at their place of work. In the case of the contractors, who represented many different firms scattered over the city, there was no time or place where they would in the normal course of business come together. Therefore, it was necessary to meet during the evening at a mutually convenient place away from a work location.

Getting Started

The contractors group held sixteen meetings over a two-year period from January, 1960 to November, 1961. These meetings fell into two distinct phases. The first phase, which included seven meetings spread throughout 1960, was tentative and exploratory. Things got under way when Mr. Trevor Hall of Panel Engineering, a firm specializing in precast concrete panels,

invited the director of Detroit Industrial Mission to lunch in order to find out more about the Mission and what its approach might mean for men in the construction industry. In this initial contact, Mr. Hall was encouraged to try to convene a group of men from the industry for serious discussion, and was promised the aid of a D.I.M. resource person. He then invited to a luncheon meeting nine of his business friends and associates (three architects, three general contractors, and three subcontractors). After they discussed the present system of bidding for contracts and some of its abuses, Mr. Hall suggested the possibility of meeting on a regular basis to further explore serious ethical issues facing men in the construction industry. Reaction to this suggestion was mixed: the architects declined because they doubted the value for themselves of further probing what they felt to be primarily the contractors' problems—but others felt it would be valuable to continue.

There followed a series of several meetings during which the group was groping to find its form and purpose. It was decided that luncheon meetings were impractical and that evenings would be better; new recruits for the group were named and invited; problems of competition and bidding were chewed over, and other possible topics for future meetings were explored. During this period attendance was erratic and averaged three to five men; meetings were irregular and sometimes had to be postponed or cancelled.

At the end of a year of this, a core group of six men had emerged and had reached a consensus regarding the purpose and future of the group. They shared enthusiasm and a conviction that a group to discuss the ethical dilemmas facing men in the construction industry would be of real value to themselves and to their business associates. They also shared a sense of frustration at the lack of progress and attendance in the group during its first months of existence, and determined that definite changes should be made.

The Second Phase

The second phase began in January, 1961 when the core group constituted itself as a sort of steering committee and made plans for inviting a larger group of about twenty men in the construction industry. Given the erratic schedules of men in the industry, it was agreed that a membership of this many would be essential in order to be able to count on about twelve men at any given meeting. They agreed upon topics to be discussed over a series of five monthly meetings. Dates and topics for the meetings were fixed in advance, and each member of the steering committee invited three or four of his friends from the industry to join the group. The criteria for being invited were (1) openness to exploration of serious issues relating to business, and (2) having ideas or experience to contribute to the group's deliberations. The understanding was that one would be committed to come to the entire series of five, but would be under no commitment beyond that; at the conclusion of the series the group would decide whether or not it would be valuable to continue, and for how long.

The full group of twenty-one was convened in February, 1961 for an introductory session; then followed four meetings, March through June. After the June meeting it was decided that it would be helpful to have two or three more meetings in the fall in which the D.I.M. resource person—whose role in the group up to this point had been that of asking questions, trying to identify problems, and listening and summarizing—would attempt to give his reactions to the problems thus far analyzed, speaking more explicitly from a theological point of view than had been done heretofore in the discussions. Three further meetings were held for this purpose in September, October, and November, 1961, whereupon the group ended. Although there was still considerable interest on the part of some members of the group in continuing discussions, it was thought wise to end the

group with a clean break, rather than to go on indefinitely and allow it to slowly wither. Attendance throughout this second phase varied between twelve and twenty, averaging about sixteen.

After early experiments which showed that lunch-time meetings were not feasible, the group settled on a dinner meeting format. Men gathered at 5:30 in a conveniently located country club, relaxed and chatted over a drink, and carried on informal conversation over dinner from 6:00 until 7:00—dinner being served at one large table. The dishes having been cleared away and coffee served, the subject scheduled for the evening would be introduced by one of the men in a brief presentation—perhaps a case study—setting forth a specific issue. Conversation would wax hot around the table until time for adjournment came at 9:00 P.M.

Taking the Lead

Leadership in the group rested primarily upon two persons. Mr. Trevor Hall, president of Panel Engineering Corporation, served from the beginning as convener and chairman. He was personally responsible for inviting and gathering together the original small group to explore with respresentatives of D.I.M. the possibility of a discussion group dealing with some of the moral dilemmas of the contracting business. His enthusiasm and continued carrying of responsibility were essential to the success of the group. Mr. Hall, with the help of Mr. Robert E. Johnson of the A. J. Etkin Construction Company, arranged for the meeting place, handled meal reservations, and served as host and chairman for the meetings themselves. He was in frequent telephone contact with members of the group between meetings.

Working closely with Mr. Hall as resource person was a member of the staff of Detroit Industrial Mission. In the early months this person was Mr. Robert F. Grindley; in September, 1960 he was succeeded by Rev. Robert C.

Batchelder. His role included consulting with Mr. Hall on plans for the group, and meeting with individual members of the group between meetings to identify themes and develop presentations for the general meetings. He usually served as moderator and summarizer for the discussion. During the conversation his role was not that of preacher or moral teacher, but rather that of questioner, catalyst and listener. During the final three sessions his role was much more active when, at the request of the group, he made the opening presentations for the discussions and attempted to say explicitly what he thought was the contribution of Christian teaching to some of the central themes raised in earlier sessions.

Leadership was shared widely within the group in the making of presentations on particular topics: for each evening one or two men were assigned responsibility for making a provocative but brief presentation to serve as take-off point for discussion. The opening pitch might be a statement of one man's position on a given issue, a case study, or a debate presenting conflicting positions.

II. ISSUES AND THEMES

The conversation of the contractors did not center on the technical details of putting together a building; rather the problems and dilemmas that concerned them lay in the area of over-all management of the business. What bothered them most were the areas of estimating, bidding and financing, and those areas involving relationships with other persons or groups: dealings between contractor, subcontractor, competitors, architect, owner, employees, and unions. Their headaches centered in the human or interpersonal aspects rather than the technical aspects of building.

Topics formally discussed included the following:

Problems of Bidding
Gambling Aspects of the Contracting Business
Good Relations Between General Contractors and Subcontractors
Architects, Owners and Contractors
Dealing with Labor Unions
Problems of Getting Your Money
The Semi-permanent Employee
Competition and Christianity
Basically Are We in Business to Make Money?
Maintaining Integrity in a Cost-Conscious Market

There was considerable overlapping and duplication from one topic to the next. Instead of describing in detail each and every session, it will perhaps be more fruitful to summarize the main recurring themes of the conversation.

Bidding and Competition

The earliest conversations of the contractors started where the shoe pinched them most acutely: in the area of competitive bidding for jobs. The centrality of this issue for contracting work was demonstrated not only by the fact that this was the natural starting point for discussion of their problems—but also by the tendency of every later conversation, no matter what its announced topic, to veer back again to the subject of bidding and cut-throat competition. Bidding for jobs among many competing firms is built into the structure of the construction industry and deeply influences every other aspect of the business.

Building contractors in the Detroit area face a situation that approximates the perfect competition described in economics textbooks. There are many relatively small producers; entry into the field is easy and does not require large

amounts of capital. If the biggest builder withheld his services from the market, he wouldn't be missed. The product offered by each is presumably equal to that offered by all—or at any rate there is little way for the consumer to tell in advance which contractor will in fact give him the most building for his dollar.

This basic competitive situation has been sharply intensified in the Detroit area during the past several years. The volume of building decreased by 33% from 1955 to 1959; since then the building market has continued sluggish. Yet the number of contractors bidding on the remaining jobs is higher than ever, having increased 25 to 30 percent during the same period. Whenever lack of work forces a large firm to cut back its operation, its laid-off superintendent will very likely set himself up as a contractor and submit a bid on the very next job. The result is that a job that might have attracted ten or fifteen bidders a few years ago now attracts thirty. With that many contractors bidding the job, it is virtually certain that one of them will make a major error, or will be willing in desperation to bid the job at cost or even below in order to keep his organization together and to cover his overhead costs. The result is that the most desperate contractor—or the one making the largest mistake—gets the bid. He may go bankrupt in the process of trying to fulfill his contract—or he may skimp on materials and cut corners on workmanship in order to take only a small loss. At any rate, a job that could have been profitable is ruined for everyone.

"It's Dog Eat Dog!"

The result of this intense competition is a dog-eat-dog situation in which men do whatever they feel they are forced to do in order to survive. Contractors submit low bids in the hope that they may be able to substitute lower grade materials for those specified by the architect. The general contractor may stoop to "bid

peddling''—revealing competing subcontractors' bids to a favored subcontractor in exchange for a cut-rate bid from the favored sub that gives the general an advantage over his competitors. In order to avoid having their bids peddled, most subcontractors wait until the last fifteen minutes before the deadline before phoning in their bids to the general contractor. The general may receive last-minute low bids from subcontractors of whom he has never heard and whose reliability he has no time to investigate. Scrambling to put together his final overall bid amid a flood of phone calls from several subcontractors in each of a dozen trades, trying to judge whether to risk using in his bid a low figure from an unreliable or unknown sub, the general contractor may, in the confusion, make a costly error.

After he bids successfully and receives the contract, a general contractor may not award the electrical or plumbing contract to the subcontractor who submitted the low figure the general used in arriving at his own successful bid. He may play competing subcontractors one against the other in an effort to get one to accept the work for 5% or 10% less than the lowest bid. In this way a general contractor who submits a low bid by figuring it at cost, with no margin for his own profit, makes his profit at the expense of subcontractors by forcing anyone who hopes to get a job to cut his margin of profit to the bone.

The result of all this is a situation in which deception, breaking faith, and mutual suspicion come to be the accepted mode of operation; one must indulge in these things oneself in order to survive. Another result is that quality tends to suffer, as contractors are tempted to cut corners and substitute inferior materials for those specified in order to avoid loss on a bid that was too low in the first place. The inevitable outcome is that the consumer gets exactly what he pays for: He gets a building for the lowest possible price—but he ends up with the minimum possible quality.

Maintaining Integrity

How is a Christian, or any man of integrity, to survive in a business where—as one man put it—"there is dishonesty at every point up and down the line"? Shall he give up his principles in order to survive economically? Or shall he stubbornly maintain his integrity and watch his business wither because of desperate and unscrupulous competitors?

The men in the group were keenly aware of the corruption produced in the building industry when deception and dishonesty and cut-throating are widespread. They saw clearly that if everyone operates on the basis of suspicion and distrust, and takes protective action on the expectation that everyone else is seeking to take advantage of him, the prediction becomes self-fulfilling, dishonesty feeds upon itself, and evil is multiplied. The consensus was that to become cynical and to operate by sheer expediency was not a live option for them; it could only make matters worse. Nevertheless it would be utterly naive to do business on the assumption that everyone else is honest and can be trusted. They expressed admiration for their acquaintances in business who exemplified integrity, adherence to principle, and refusal to compromise—but ruefully noted that most of these people were faced with declining profits.

There seemed to be a consensus that for them the responsible position was somewhere in between complete cynicism and ideal or absolute integrity. There was a frank recognition that so long as we continue to live in a world that is involved in corruption and sin, it is not possible entirely to avoid participation in evil; if one intends to stay in the construction business, then one must on occasion do things that violate one's own standard of ethics. In such a case one must do so reluctantly but "bravely"—and without throwing overboard one's standard and saying "What's the use?" At all costs the tension must be maintained between

what one's standard of honesty and integrity demand, and what is possible and necessary in a particular given situation. One should always be alert for that opportunity when things are fluid enough to make it possible to give a little "tug" upward, toward making the situation more consistent with one's standards of morality and integrity. We should resist the illusion that we can be perfect in this world—but we must also resist the temptation to settle for things as they are. The tension between things as they are and things as they ought to be must never be relaxed.

Steps Toward Improvement

Apart from one's personal attitude, there are certain things that a contracting firm can and should do which are consistent with integrity and will help it to survive in intense competition without stooping to unethical practices. One is to have an alert and efficient operation, one which always seeks to reduce its own overhead costs, to tighten up its schedule, one which is always on the lookout for improvements in methods and equipment. Thorough researching of prospective jobs will enable one to avoid mistakes, and also will help one to bid only those jobs which his organization can do better than others. Imaginative searching out of new techniques and new products, new services, new needs to be met and new ways of meeting old needs—all this will keep one's firm a jump ahead of its competition, enable it to make better profits, and serve the consumer better. In many ways efficiency is in harmony with morality.

Certain improvements in the structure of the industry would also tend to alleviate abuses. The group (including the architects) agreed that the architect is the key person in maintaining quality in accordance with specifications. The architect or his representative should be actively on the job policing the construction to see that

proper materials are used. If the architect could be counted upon to be firm in this, and also in refusing to allow changes in the specifications after the bid has been awarded, it would go a long way toward eliminating the temptation for the contractor to bid low in hopes of effecting savings through substitutions later. Further, it was suggested that architects could help by using a "base bid" system: the architect's specification would indicate the precise materials upon which bids were to be based, eliminating the "or equivalent" loophole. All contractors would be required to submit bids on the basis of the specified materials, but would have the option of submitting alternative bids showing a lower figure based upon specific substitutions. The owner and architect could then make a deliberate choice as to whether the proposed savings would be worth it, considering the change in materials.

Various suggestions for a bid depository were mentioned as a means of avoiding abuses such as bid-shopping, although cynics in the group insisted that any depository system could be circumvented, given the will to do so. Another change in bidding procedures that was discussed was prequalification. By having some system whereby only well-qualified and financially responsible firms would be permitted to submit bids on certain classes of jobs, it might be possible to eliminate much of the confusion caused by unscrupulous and marginal contractors, while still preserving the value of vigorous competition among reputable firms.

Finally, it was clearly recognized that Detroit's construction industry is a part of the larger community, and is deeply influenced by such things as the health of the automobile industry and the success of Michigan firms in obtaining defense contracts. Many of the industry's problems would be much easier to solve if the national economy were expanding more rapidly.

The Purpose and Goal of Work

"After all, we are in business basically to make money!" This thesis, bluntly stated and vigorously defended by one of the members of the group, was a second major theme that became the center of discussion upon several occasions. The consensus of the rest of the group was that men in construction not only ought to, but actually do, seek many things other than money in their work. A central motivation for many is the thrill of conceiving and then bringing into reality a building that is beautiful and that serves men's needs. To build something that will endure gives a real sense of satisfaction.

All stoutly maintained the necessity of making a profit: without profit no business can continue to exist. Most in the group agreed with one man who said, "Our purpose is to render service, and to stay in business indefinitely; therefore we have to make money. But if making money becomes an end in itself, then it gets out of proportion." For some members of the group the necessity of making a profit was almost a distraction from the pleasurable activity of constructing buildings; for others it was clear that making a profit was an independent end in itself which added to the satisfaction derived from the activity of building.

Another motive that was clearly operative for many of the men was the desire to do a "quality job". There was much bewailing of the loss of craftsmanship today, and the high priority given to low cost to the detriment of quality. "No one wants a quality building any more; everyone wants the cheapest building." Much of the frustration in the life of a contractor comes from the conflict between his inherent desire to do a "quality job" and the limitations imposed upon him by a bidding system built upon the lowest possible cost.

Relations with Employees and Unions

Discussions relating to employees focused upon the problem of incentive. What can be done to elicit initiative and responsibility on the part of the employee and get him to take pride in doing a good job? There was considerable complaining about laziness and the loss of a sense of craftsmanship among workers today.

Labor unions were generally viewed by members of the group as making things worse. "The industry is competitive; the union is trying to make it non-competitive" (by protecting the mediocre worker). There was general dissatisfaction with various union practices: featherbedding, strikes, uniform wage rates which allegedly discourage individual initiative and craftsmanship, hiring hall procedures, jurisdictional disputes, seniority provisions, and constant pressure for higher wages and fringe benefits.

During the discussion there emerged recognition that some of the union practices that contractors find distasteful are not caused solely by the malevolence of labor leaders, but are the result of situations for which management shares some responsibility. It was frankly stated that certain hiring hall abuses that contractors are now unhappy about were started during the war with the encouragement of Detroit contractors who saw in them a means of making it harder for out-of-town contractors to compete in the Detroit market. Or again, it was recognized that jurisdictional disputes, featherbedding practices, and the pressure for "excessively high" wages and fringe benefits all stem from the same basic cause—the erratic employment pattern in the construction industry that makes it rare for a worker to be able to count upon steady employment the year around. His natural reaction is to stretch out the work that is available to make it last longer, and to try to make enough money in the months worked to tide his family over the months when there is no work. One lonely voice suggested an annual salary

instead of hourly wages as a means of avoiding these abuses by removing their root in the worker's insecurity, and also as a means of making a worker feel he has a real stake in his company. But the consensus seemed to be that it was inevitable in the building industry that workers and even foremen and job superintendents will work when a job is available and will be laid off when the job is completed. For major construction projects, such as most members of the group were engaged in, technological improvements are increasingly eliminating winter weather as a source of seasonal layoff—although this is not so true for construction of private homes. The main threat to steady employment for construction workers is a sagging economy.

III. EVALUATION

Of what value is such a series of discussions? At the lowest level the group was enjoyable as a social gathering in which new acquaintances in one's business field were made, and where one could enjoy talking shop in pleasant surroundings.

Further, the men definitely appreciated the opportunity to understand one another's points of view more intimately. Contractors learned something of the headaches of the architect, and architects learned that contractors would appreciate more rigorous enforcement of specifications. General contractors and subcontractors learned more about the pressures the other works under—and saw that they had a common interest in working for certain reforms in the bidding system that would benefit both.

Another value was encouragement and support of one another. Through the discussions it became obvious that each man was not alone in his concern for honesty and integrity, but that he could count upon others as his allies

in working to improve the atmosphere of the industry. There came the realization that within the group there were enough firms represented to make some real difference in raising the tone of the industry.

In addition, it must be said from the standpoint of the church that it was good and of some importance that the church showed an interest in these men and their work—it took seriously what is of great seriousness to them. Apart from whether the church was able to contribute anything specific in the way of insight or practical guidance, the very fact that it was involved in such a series of discussions was probably of value in implying that what happens in a man's work is of importance to God, and in providing support and encouragement to those struggling to improve the practices of the industry.

The Breaking of Myths

A further useful function provided by the discussions was that of myth-breaking. Certain clichés of the American business world, uncritically expressed early in the series, were challenged and revealed as only partial and inadequate statements. For example: "Our free competitive system works to provide the consumer with the widest choice among goods, and has produced the highest standard of living in the world." The implication of this conventional wisdom is that all competition is good, and what we need is more of it. But the contractors were painfully aware that excessive competition can be destructive and can lower rather than raise the quality of goods offered to the consumer. They ended by searching for structures and arrangements that would preserve the values of competition while avoiding its excesses.

Another myth that was firmly held and expressed by members of the group is that "Union insistence upon uniform wage rates is stifling the sense of initiative and craftsmanship among workers. Why should a good man put forth extra

effort if he will make no more than the lazy fellow?" As the facts began to emerge through the conversation, it became clear that every contractor had found ways of rewarding his superior workers—by giving them steadier work, or fringe benefits, or a premium wage rate. Thus, despite the uniform *hourly rate* bargained for by the union, the better workers have higher *yearly incomes* than mediocre workers—and thus do receive financial incentive to do quality work. Some other reasons began to emerge for the decline in craftsmanship: technological advances that have in some cases "reduced a carpenter to a mass-production nailer," and the lowest-cost orientation of the competitive market that tends to eliminate high quality workmanship from consideration because of its higher cost.

Or again, the affirmation "The primary purpose of a business enterprise is to make a profit" was exposed as an inadequate statement either of the present facts or of what ought to be. God is the God of truth; and therefore it is good when men break through myths and stereotypes to see and understand more accurately the realities of their life.

With regard to specific results deriving from the discussions, there emerged a consensus —if not upon a specific remedy, then at least upon the direction in which the industry ought to be moving in order to curb the most flagrant and painful abuses of the bidding system. Most agreed that a form of bid depository and a pre-qualification system held forth promise of being both feasible and helpful. Since the termination of the group, members have in their various places of responsibility in the industry made some moves in the direction of establishing such arrangements in the Detroit area.

Limitations

Although the series produced some valuable results, it also suffered from some serious limitations. One limitation was that of time,

and stemmed from the evening meeting format of the series. American urban and suburban life being what it is, it is extremely difficult to maintain a series of evening meetings for very long. Conflicts with other meetings, and demands of home and family soon conspire to produce declining attendance. Therefore it is probably wise to plan to terminate an evening series after a limited number of meetings. The difficulty is that such a limited number of meetings is sufficient to raise problems, but insufficient to enable the group to ponder them, to come back to them again and again, and finally to reach some resolution on them. We cannot be said to be really serious about the issues men face in their work if we do not take adequate time to explore them with the thoroughness they deserve.

Several inconsistencies were left hanging unresolved in the contractors group. For example, one night the group would all nod in agreement with the vigorous statement that honesty, integrity and morality are foundation stones for success in the business world; "if a man ever sacrifices his principles for a profit, he is lost!" The next night the group would agree that it is sometimes necessary for a man to compromise with his principles in order to survive economically. To have had somewhat more time to attack such inconsistencies head-on would have made the group more fruitful.

Can Christianity Contribute?

A second limitation was the fact that the resource person was unable to provide very much that was concrete and helpful to the men in resolving some of the particular dilemmas that faced them. Some of the men indicated a little disappointment that more wasn't said of a distinctly "ethical" or "religious" nature. Apparently they had hoped to hear some "religious teaching" that would provide them with rather concrete practical guidance; what they did hear was rather general.

In part the expectation that a clergyman could listen to issues being discussed for a few sessions, and then given advice that would solve deep-rooted problems, was an illusory and improper expectation. The working out of specific applications of Christian teaching for problem situations in the world belongs to the laity, who alone have (at least theoretically) intimate knowledge both of the faith and of the details of the particular situation. The kind of discussions we had was a good example of the process that must take place in deriving specific guidance for the Christian's behavior in each new situation or milieu—except that the time allotted was not commensurate with the depth of the issues.

In part, however, failure to make a helpful "Christian" contribution *was* a failure on the part of the church resource person—and illustrates a major problem for the church today: she does not know how to speak the eternal truth of the Gospel in a way that can be understood and appropriated by modern industrialized man. Most of the contractors in the group were Protestants; many are regular in attendance at worship and are active churchmen, serving as church school teachers and members of governing committees and boards. But when the attempt was made to speak of the idea of vocation, the Christian's special calling to serve God in the world; or the idea of man as created in the image of God, yet also a sinner; or the idea of forgiveness of sin and justification by grace—when the attempt was made to relate these central doctrines of the faith to the issues we had been discussing, there was scarcely a sign of recognition. Certainly there was no spark of response, no great awakening of insight. It may have been due to the resource leader's lack of skill in interpreting and making clear the relevance of these crucial insights of the biblical tradition. But it may also be that these phrases and ideas have lost their power to move men—that the traditional formulations of the Gospel constitute answers to questions that men are no longer asking in today's world.

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Surely the task of the clergy leader in such a group as this must be to contribute to the conversation by articulating the insights of the Christian faith in such a way that they are both relevant to the issues under consideration and also meaningful to those who hear. This means that one of the crucial challenges confronting the church today is to rediscover within its tradition those words and ideas and insights that will strike the spark of response in twentieth century industrialized men, and enable them to renew and reorder their life and their work in response to the gracious action of God.

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